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Tenure, knowledge, results make Republican Dave Weldon the choice for Congress

Florida Today Editorial

For the past 10 years, U. S. Rep. Dave Weldon has been a fixture in Congress representing Brevard County residents.

The Melbourne Republican has done it by espousing the staunch conservative views the majority of his constituents like, and which consistently gain him re- election.

It's no secret we strongly disagree with him on issues such as federal funding for embryonic stem cell research, ensuring a woman's right to choose and repealing some of President Bush's tax cuts - all of which we support, and he doesn't.

We'll continue to challenge him where we believe he's wrong, and hope he moderates his positions.

But after a decade in Congress, Weldon shows a dedication, command of the issues and growing ability to get things done for the Space Coast that's commendable, which is why we recommend voters give him a sixth term on Capitol Hill.

In fact, Weldon's seat on the House Appropriations Committee, which plays a central role in setting federal spending, puts him in

an excellent position to serve the 15th District, which includes much of Brevard and all of Indian River and Osceola counties.

Here are some areas where Weldon deserves particular credit:

--- Hurricane relief

After his district was battered by three hurricanes, Weldon quickly visited the worst- hit areas and played a role in getting Congress to pass \$ 11.5 billion in emergency relief for Florida.

Of special importance was Weldon's work in gaining \$ 200 million for statewide beach renourishment, an issue that's among his strong suits.

Over the past decade, he has brought \$ 35 million in renourishment money to our coast.

Weldon understands that stable beaches are essential to maintaining Brevard's tourism industry and the jobs and tax revenue it brings to our community. Furthermore, he promises to keep beach restoration among his top local priorities.

We're also pleased to hear Weldon say he'll " push hard" for more hurricane relief next year because the damage and suffering won't be over.

There're two other things we like as well: First, Weldon is rightly trying to convince state lawmakers in his district to press for putting all new home and business utilities underground to prevent the hardship and economic trauma caused when hurricanes topple power lines.

We've been saying the Legislature should do the same thing, and hope Weldon's voice in the chorus helps convince legislators to get it done.

Second, he wants the Legislature to examine building codes to make roofs statewide meet the more hurricane- resistant Maimi-Dade rules. He should go a step further and prod them to do it.

--- NASA

Weldon has long been a steadfast advocate for NASA, making his House Appropriations Committee seat critical because of the bipartisan trouble the moon- Mars initiative faces as Congress weighs its cost.

He knows what we know - the plan can spur scientific and technological innovation, create a new generation of scientists and engineers, and ensure that America's spirit of exploration continues.

To that end, he's working with members of both parties to craft budgets that will allow NASA to return the shuttles to orbit to finish the International Space Station, then retire the ships, build a next- generation spacecraft and head to the moon and Mars.

He also believes international cooperation is valuable in making all of this work and supports eventually bringing China into the project - a smart move we've also been urging.

--- District efforts

Weldon has been involved in two important environmental projects by helping purchase land to restore the Upper Basin of the St. Johns River and revitalize the Kissimmee River.

Both are good for wildlife, good for flood control and good for drinking water supplies, the latter of which Weldon properly recognizes as a critical issue in rapidly growing Central Florida.

He's also pushing the Army Corps of Engineers to reverse the flow of the C- 1 Canal through Palm Bay to keep polluted runoff from flowing into the Indian River Lagoon.

Weldon has garnered money for the effort, but the Corps is dragging its feet.

What Weldon needs to do now is take this awareness and transfer it to national environmental issues, where his voting record leaves very much to be desired.

In other areas, he's worked closely with Brevard groups to save Patrick Air Force Base from closure, recently got \$ 8.8 million for a new security forces building on the base, and funneled \$ 3 million in grants to Florida for alternative- energy hydrogen research.

Weldon is opposed by Democrat Simon Pristoop of Satellite Beach, a retired defense industry worker and local Democratic Party activist.

Pristoop deserves praise for running a shoestring campaign. And while we agree with him on major issues where we've long ago parted company with Weldon, he's way over- matched. That makes Weldon the choice.

Coming recommendations. Tuesday, U. S. Senate; Wednesday, Titusville Mayor and City Council; Thursday, Melbourne Mayor and City Council.